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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (12/29): "Massacre" in Gaza
provokes anger with Israel, international community

Main Stories:

The Israeli airstrikes in Gaza constitute the dominant story in all the Palestinian dailies, with extensive coverage on their front and inside pages. The entire front page of Al Quds is printed against a black background, and the headlines of Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadeeda are printed on black banners. The papers describe the Israeli offensive as an "ongoing massacre," stating that approximately 360 Palestinians have been killed and more than 1000 injured thus far, with more than 180 critically wounded. Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadeeda run front-page photos of victims of the Israeli air strikes, showing prisoners fleeing a Hamas prison destroyed by a missile and a prisoner emerging from under the rubble, as Fatah accused Hamas of abandoning Fatah prisoners in prisons under Israeli attack. Al Hayat Al Jadeeda's front page reports that two Fatah prisoners were killed by Hamas police when fleeing the destroyed prison. The papers state that Israeli has mobilized reservists and also report that "informed Hamas sources" claim that captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit has been injured in the Israeli strikes. According to the papers, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak will allow 100 trucks carrying medical and food supplies to enter Gaza today.

In Egypt-related coverage of the Israeli offensive, the papers claim that Israeli military reporters have hinted at Israeli plans to reoccupy the Philadelphia border strip between Egypt and Gaza. Al Hayat Al Jadeeda's front page reports that an Egyptian border police officer was killed by Hamas yesterday, and adds that PA President Abbas condemned the killing as a "cowardly act." The papers devote front page coverage to comments made by President Abbas after meeting Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak yesterday, quoting Abbas as saying that what happened in Gaza was "avoidable" and that he was seriously working to protect the Palestinians in Gaza. The papers

also front-page statements by Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasrallah, urging the Egyptian people to "go to the streets in millions to open the Rafah border crossing to Gaza." The papers add that Egypt opened the crossing to permit the injured to leave Gaza, but that Hamas wouldn't allow them to leave, demanding that the Rafah crossing be opened for normal traffic. On an inside page, Al Quds cites an AFP report quoting the Egyptian Foreign Minister Abu Al Gheit criticizing Hamas for not allowing injured Gazans to leave Gaza for treatment in Egypt, which had dispatched ambulances to bring in the injured Palestinians.

The papers provide front page coverage of demonstrations held in the West Bank and around the world to protest against the Israeli offensive. The papers report that two Palestinians were killed by the Israeli military yesterday in the villages of Ni'lin and Silwad, near Ramallah, in confrontations that erupted during protest rallies. The papers also report that 15 Palestinians in Hebron, and 30 youths in Jerusalem, were injured during protest rallies. An Al Quds inside page reports that Christians in Jericho cancelled Christmas and New Year celebrations in protest against the Israeli offensive. The papers also report on protest demonstrations held in different Arab and European countries. An Al Quds inside page cites a Reuters report quoting Vatican sources that Pope Benedict XVI's planned visit to the Holy Land should not be cancelled despite the growing violence in the Gaza Strip. Al Hayat Al Jadeeda's front page cites an AFP report that President Bush is following up the situation in Gaza and has been briefed by National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley.

WEEKEND STORIES

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Sunday, December 28

The three dailies dedicate their front pages to the events in Gaza. The main headlines appear in a large, bold font against a black background and read: "The massacre - 230 martyrs and 770 wounded in Gaza." The papers report that Israeli F16 and Apache warplanes fired dozens of missiles in a surprise attack against the Gaza Strip, targeting Hamas' military, police, and security installations, as well as Hamas government buildings. Citing Palestinian medical sources, the papers note that the total number of Gazans killed could rise to 350, given the number of individuals with critical injuries, the lack of medical supplies in the hospitals, and the number of people still trapped under the rubble. Among the Palestinians reported killed were the Hamas Chief of Police Tawfiq Jabr, the governor of the central Gaza Strip, and Ismail Al Ja'bari, the Hamas Chief of Security and Protection. Meanwhile, President Abbas, the government of the Palestinian Authority (PA), and the Palestinian leadership are quoted as condemning the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and calling for a national day of mourning and a general strike on Sunday, December 28. The three papers report that President Abbas is reaching out to Arab and international parties to discuss the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip and the means to end it. President Abbas travelled to Jordan on December 27 to meet with King Abdullah II of Jordan and planned to visit Egypt on December 28 to discuss the issue with President Mubarak.

Al Quds and Al Ayyam report in length on angry popular demonstrations that broke out throughout the West Bank on Saturday in response to the Israeli airstrikes in Gaza, and note that the protests led to confrontations with the Israeli army in a number of cities, including Ramallah, Hebron, and Bethlehem. The papers also note that confrontations took place between Fatah activists and Israeli soldiers in different locations in East Jerusalem, including the Shu'fat refugee camp, the Qalandia refugee camp, Dahyiet Al Bareed, Ar-Ram, Al Issawiyyah, Salah Eddeen Street, Sultan Suleiman Street and Az Zahara Street. Various Palestinian institutions and political factions are cited as condemning the aggression and calling for the Palestinian people to unite and overcome their disagreements at this difficult time. In East Jerusalem, a general commercial strike was observed in response to a call by the Fatah movement in the city.

According to Al Quds, the Hamas leadership has demanded that Arab countries sever all relations with Israel and has asked Egypt to

open its Rafah border with Gaza as a "practical" response to the Israeli offensive. Hamas is quoted as declaring that "the aggression will not weaken the Palestinian people, but rather will reinforce their steadfastness and pride." The Hamas statement added that "the Palestinian people will not accept only statements of condemnation from Arab and Islamic regimes, when what we need are practical steps and measures to end the aggression." Meanwhile, Khaled Mishal, the head of Hamas' political bureau, reportedly called for a new Intifada and the resumption of "suicide attacks" inside Israel. Ismail Haniyeh, the leader of Hamas in Gaza, reiterated in a televised speech on Saturday that the "Israeli aggression will not force Hamas movement to give in, even if Israel annihilates Gaza totally." He added that, "this ugly massacre will not stop the expansion of the resistance and we will continue to confront this arrogant occupation and its policies of deception."

Al Quds and Al Ayyam report that Syrian President Bashar Al Assad, the current president of the Arab League, called for an emergency Arab summit to take place as soon as possible, while Qatar officially requested that the Arab League convene an emergency Arab

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Summit in Doha on Friday, January 2, 2009. Egypt reportedly expressed reservations, and said that during the meeting of Arab Foreign Ministers scheduled to take place on December 28 in Cairo, the necessity for such a summit would be discussed.

Saturday, December 27

Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadeeda report that two young girls were killed, and a third seriously wounded, in a mysterious explosion in the Atattra neighborhood in the north of the Gaza Strip. The papers note there was conflicting news about the nature of the explosion, with some residents speculating that a locally made Palestinian rocket might have hit the family's house by mistake. Israeli army sources are quoted as denying any involvement in the incident. The papers also report that Hamzeh Tayseer Shaheen, a reporter affiliated with an independent news agency, died of injuries sustained three weeks earlier in an Israeli airstrike.

Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadeeda report that Hamas militants continued to fire rounds of rockets into Israeli territory, despite Israeli warnings that it would retaliate militarily. As Israel conducted maneuvers near the Gazan border and prepared for a military operation in Gaza, it opened three crossing points on Saturday to permit the entry of food and fuel. Egypt is reported as boosting its security measures along its border with Gaza, fearing a mass exodus of Palestinians towards the Egyptian border in the event of an Israeli attack.

Al Quds and Al Ayyam note that Israel will launch its 2008 census survey on December 28, and will include residences in East Jerusalem. According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, the purpose of the survey is to compile a full and true picture of people's living conditions, demographic characteristics, and socio-economic conditions. The papers also report that the new mayor of Jerusalem has established a special office to handle East Jerusalem affairs, under the direction of Yaqir Segev, who heads the media for the Settler's Council in the West Bank.

All three dailies report that scores of Palestinians were injured when Israeli forces dispersed peaceful anti-wall protests in the villages of Bil'in, Ni'lin, Al Ma'sara, and Jayyous. In Ni'lin, dozens of settlers gathered at a military checkpoint located at the entrance of the village, while soldiers fired rubber bullets and tear gas against protestors.

Friday, December 26

Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadeeda lead with Israeli threats against Hamas in Gaza. Israeli Foreign Minister Livni is quoted as threatening to "silence" Hamas rockets. The Arab League's Assistant Secretary General, Mohamad Sbaih, is quoted responding to Livni's statements, saying that Israel offered nothing to the Palestinian Authority, and instead continued its settlement activities, its incursions into West Bank cities, and its "siege" of Gaza. Al Ayyam,

citing Al Arabiya TV, quotes Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert as saying that he was giving the Palestinians in Gaza one last chance to pressure Hamas to stop firing rockets on Israel. The papers report on Egypt's efforts to reach a ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel.

All papers devote front page coverage to the sentencing of Ahmed Saadat, the Secretary General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, to thirty years of prison by an Israeli court. President Abbas is quoted as condemning the sentence as

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"unacceptable and unjustified."

Thursday, December 25

All papers lead with the killing of six Palestinians in Israeli strikes on Gaza on Wednesday, December 24, as Palestinian militants fired dozens of projectiles into Israeli territory. The papers cite Israeli TV Channel 2 revealing that the Israeli military had received the "green light" to launch an offensive in Gaza.

Al Ayyam and Al Quds cite a recent report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs showing a sharp qualitative and quantitative increase in Israeli settler attacks against Palestinians, especially children and the elderly, in the West Bank.

All the dailies run front page coverage of the death of Juma' Ismail, a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine who was serving a life term in an Israeli prison. President Abbas is quoted demanding an international investigation into his death, allegedly due to "medical negligence."

The Al Quds economic page reports on a workshop held at the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce on December 24 to discuss USAID private sector development projects. The head of the USAID delegation highlighted USAID's efforts to create new jobs in the Palestinian private sector.

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) An Al Quds editorial entitled "A shame stigma for the international community" (12/29) comments on the Israeli offensive in Gaza: " It is a stigma of shame on the forehead of the international community, the Quartet and the Arab and Muslim leaders, who don't make a serious move to stop the [Israeli] aggression and to side with our people in Gaza. They are the same leaders who believed that it was possible to make peace with Israel, so they proposed the Arab peace initiative, which Israel ignored.... As the Arab silence goes on, the credibility of America, Europe and the Arab regimes collapses, and it becomes evident that what is required is to have a wretched Palestinian people incapable of saying "no" to anyone trying to violate their rights and dignity."

2) Talal Okal opines in Al Ayyam under the title, "A rational view despite the dreadfulness of the massacre" (12/29): "The international stand colludes with what is being done by Israel, which prepared for its ugly aggression with a public relations campaign, as [international] calls are limited to the logic of appealing for a ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians, as if the matter related to equally strong parties. The American stand was, as usual, the worst of all, as Condoleezza Rice condemned the Gaza-based Hamas bombing of Israel, without making any criticism against Israel.... The bet of the Palestinian citizens is to consider this aggression an incentive towards making [internal national] dialogue and ending internal divisions; otherwise, the Palestinian situation as well as the Palestinian cause will suffer more dangers."

WALLES